

MORESQUE ORNAMENT.

PLATE XLII†.

5. Panelling on the Walls, House of Sanchez. 6. Part of the Ceiling of the Portico of the Court of the Fish-pond.

PLATE XLIII.

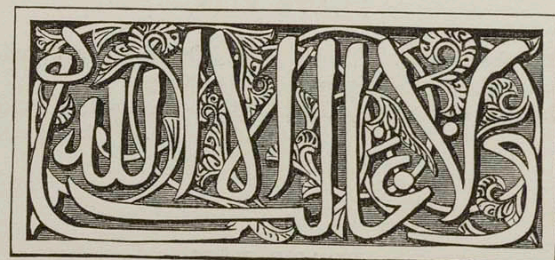
MOSAICS.

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| 1. Pilaster, Hall of the Ambassadors. | 9. Dado in centre Window, Hall of the Ambassadors. |
| 2. Dado, ditto. | 10. Pilaster, Hall of the Ambassadors. |
| 3. Dado, Hall of the Two Sisters. | 11. Dado, Hall of Justice. |
| 4. Pilaster, Hall of the Ambassadors. | 12, 13. Dados, Hall of the Ambassadors. |
| 5, 6. Dados, Hall of the Two Sisters. | 14. From a Column, Hall of Justice. |
| 7. Pilaster, Hall of Justice. | 15. Dado in the Baths. |
| 8. Dado, Hall of the Two Sisters. | 16. Dado in Divan, Court of the Fish-pond. |

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OUR illustrations of the ornament of the Moors have been taken exclusively from the Alhambra, not only because it is the one of their works with which we are best acquainted, but also because it is the one in which their marvellous system of decoration reached its culminating point. The Alhambra is at the very summit of perfection of Moorish art, as is the Parthenon of Greek art. We can find no work so fitted to illustrate a Grammar of Ornament as that in which every ornament contains a grammar in itself. Every principle which we can derive from the study of the ornamental art of any other people is not only ever present here, but was by the Moors more universally and truly obeyed.

We find in the Alhambra the speaking art of the Egyptians, the natural grace and refinement of the Greeks, the geometrical combinations of the Romans, the Byzantines, and the Arabs. The ornament wanted but one charm, which was the peculiar feature of the Egyptian ornament, symbolism. This the religion of the Moors forbade; but the want was more than supplied by the inscriptions, which, addressing themselves to the eye by their outward beauty, at once excited the intellect by the difficulties of deciphering their curious and complex involutions, and delighted the imagination when read, by the beauty of the sentiments they expressed and the music of their composition.



"There is no conqueror but God." Arabic inscription from the Alhambra.

To the artist and those provided with a mind to estimate the value of the beauty to which they gave a life they repeated, *Look and learn*. To the people they proclaimed the might, majesty, and good deeds of the king. To the king himself they never ceased declaring that there was none powerful but God, that He alone was conqueror, and that to Him alone was for ever due praise and glory.

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The builders of this wonderful structure were fully aware of the greatness of their work. It is asserted in the inscriptions on the walls, that this building surpassed all other buildings; that at sight of its wonderful domes all other domes vanished and disappeared; in the playful exaggeration of their poetry, that the stars grew pale in their light through envy of so much beauty; and, what is more to our purpose, they declare that he who should study them with attention would reap the benefit of a commentary on decoration.

We have endeavoured to obey the injunctions of the poet, and will attempt here to explain some of the general principles which appear to have guided the Moors in the decoration of the Alhambra—principles which are not theirs alone, but common to all the best periods of art. The principles which are everywhere the same, the forms only differ.

1.* The Moors ever regarded what we hold to be the first principle in architecture—to *decorate construction, never to construct decoration*: in Moorish architecture not only does the decoration arise naturally from the construction, but the constructive idea is carried out in every detail of the ornamentation of the surface.

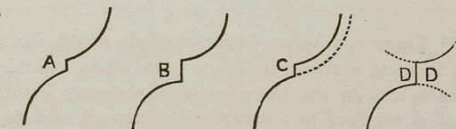
We believe that true beauty in architecture results from that "*repose which the mind feels when the eye, the intellect, and the affections are satisfied, from the absence of any want.*" When an object is constructed falsely, appearing to derive or give support without doing either the one or the other, it fails to afford this repose, and therefore never can pretend to true beauty, however harmonious it may be in itself; the Mohammadan races, and Moors especially, have constantly regarded this rule; we never find a useless or superfluous ornament; every ornament arises quietly and naturally from the surface decorated. They ever regard the useful as a vehicle for the beautiful; and in this they do not stand alone: the same principle was observed in all the best periods of art; it is only when art declines that true principles come to be disregarded; or, in an age of copying, like the present, when the works of the past are reproduced without the spirit which animated the originals.

2. All lines grow out of each other in gradual undulations; there are no excrescences; nothing could be removed and leave the design equally good or better.

In a general sense, if construction be properly attended to, there could be no excrescences; but we use the word here in a more limited sense: the general lines might follow truly the construction, and yet there might be excrescences, such as knobs or bosses, which would not violate the rule of construction, and yet would be fatal to beauty of form, if they did not grow out gradually from the general lines.

There can be no beauty of form, no perfect proportion or arrangement of lines, which does not produce repose.

All transitions of curved lines from curved, or of curved lines from straight, must be gradual. Thus the transition would cease to be agreeable if the break at A were too deep in proportion to the curves, as at B. Where two curves are separated by a break (as in this case), they must, and with the Moors always do, run parallel to an imaginary line (c) where the curves would be tangential to each other; for were either to depart from this, as in the case at D, the eye, instead of following gradually down the curve, would run outwards, and repose would be lost.†



* This essay on the general principles of the ornamentation of the Alhambra is partially reprinted from the "Guide Book to the Alhambra Court in the Crystal Palace," by the Author.

† These transitions were managed most perfectly by the Greeks in all their mouldings, which exhibit this refinement in the highest degree; so do also the exquisite contours of their vases.